

MODERN MEDICINE

INFLUENCED BY

MORBID ANATOMY:

AN ORATION

DELIVERED AT THE FIFTY-SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON.

ALSO,

AN APOLOGY

FOR

Medical Nomenclature.

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LONDON:

PRINTED FOR LONGMAN AND CO. PATERNOSTER-ROW,
AND BURGESS AND HILL, GREAT WINDMILL STREET.

1830.

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TO THE
PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS
OF THE
MEDICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON,

THIS
TESTIMONIAL
OF THE
AUTHOR'S GRATITUDE AND ESTEEM
IS
RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.

May 6, 1830.



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MODERN MEDICINE INFLUENCED BY MORBID ANATOMY.

ALL rational medicine is founded upon the observation of a certain constancy and identity in diseased conditions—on the frequent recurrence of a series of morbid phenomena which have been before noticed ; for, if there were no such repetition—no such analogy to be traced—our acquaintance with disease would be continually beginning and ending with each individual case ; there could be no general or systematic rules by which to guide our opinion or our conduct—no permanent circumstance to connect the present with the past and the future ; all pathology

would be consequently purely conjectural—all practice, of necessity also, blind and empirical. And yet it is true, at the same time, that no two cases, on simple comparison, are precisely alike. Even where diseases are clearly made out and appreciated, there is some new proportion in their elements, or some difference, in kind or degree, in their circumstances, which prevents our regarding any one of these complex states as the exact duplicate of another. Nay, the very existence of malady, considered as a matter of separate study and investigation, depends upon a departure from the indefinite and fluctuating bounds of a healthy standard; between which, however, and the many preternatural modes into which the living system may pass, there exists no accurate line of demarcation.

When, then, we are told, in the same breath, of the infinite variation and complication in the particulars of disease, and the absolute necessity for method and arrangement, it becomes an important question to determine, what contrivance can ever recon-

cile propositions so discordant—what are the characteristic and permanent features of analogous diseases—and which of the associated medical sciences is to furnish us with the true test by which we may know them upon their occasional reappearance?

Between these wide and contradictory extremes have been placed the many systems of pathological writers. Finding the impossibility of retaining in the memory an innumerable variety of confused and undigested facts, and convinced that the consideration of isolated cases, whether falling under personal inspection, or recorded in books, would lead to no practical result, they have proceeded to *generalize*—that is, to distinguish among a number of diseases that common and pervading ingredient which renders certain portions of them proper to be grouped into families or classes; and to invent, on this supposed resemblance, rules for judging of similar cases, and treating them in future. This task of forming a coherent abstract from an infinity of loose and fleeting materials has been the favourite task of the medical world

in all ages. Its full attainment has been, however, beyond the grasp of the most powerful minds. But so great is its importance, that many, who have laboured at its accomplishment, have, by the mere attempt, perpetuated their names, and have been directly or indirectly serviceable; for in medicine, the conflict of opinions has always tended to elicit truth, and here, as in other pursuits, there is a necessary and constant supremacy of principles over details.

At different periods of the growth of medical science, there has been invariably some one branch of this comprehensive study, or some favourite system in the ascendant; and the revolutions in professional history have been so frequent and so complete, that each name has ruled in its turn, and every possible scheme has “tasted of empire.”

The school of Hippocrates, with which our era generally begins, taught chiefly the importance of observation and comparison. And even to this day there is considerable deference paid to its immortal founder, as well as to Sydenham, Heberden, and others

of its disciples, when their discernment, and good sense, and experience are considered apart from their deficiency of information upon questions of anatomy and physiology, and other scientific points, which have been more amply illustrated by modern teachers. The dogmatism of the Galenists and alchemists—the ill-advised attempts of many other speculators of the mathematical, mechanical, and chemical schools, to demonstrate the application of their own principles to physiological and pathological phenomena, are, on the other hand, remembered only as so many illustrations of this approved maxim, that “the most ingenious way of becoming foolish is by a system; and the surest method to prevent good sense, is to set up something in the room of it.”

The cultivation of anatomy in its various branches—descriptive, general, comparative, pathological, forms the most characteristic feature of modern medicine. The information obtained by studying the physical signs of malady during life, and by collating these with the alterations of structure which are

discovered upon dissection, is of a nature more fixed and tangible than any which can be gained from a general observation of symptoms and constitutional influences. With a just prepossession, then, in favour of this, the best foundation of pathological opinion, we may naturally ask, repeating the question which some time back arrested us, will morbid anatomy give us the only basis on which to re-erect our schemes of pathology and practice?

Let it be understood: my inquiry does not relate to the importance and scientific character of researches into the anatomical mechanism of disease. That man must be strangely blind to the value of truth who should call this in question. Neither will this opportunity be taken to string together a number of common-place observations in praise of what, all the world knows, does not, from its indispensable utility, stand in need of such eulogy. But my object is to offer some speculations as to the extent to which opinion has been modified by the cultivation of pathological anatomy;—to inquire whether an entirely new face be given to medicine by this

mode of investigating disease? whether, as has been asserted, morbid anatomy bears the same relation to pathology that chemistry does to mineralogy, bringing to light new elements, and establishing new connexions, and throwing into the shade all notions not verified by this more accurate test?

To a certain extent this is doubtless the case. Many lesions of structure are concealed, and even unsuspected, till they are revealed by anatomical research. What are called accidental membranes and adventitious substances, many new and preternatural formations, various interstitial depositions of fluid, certain tubercular maladies, as *melanosis*, and the whole tribe of hydatids, are so many additions to regular organization, completely *parasitic*; and they interfere so little with ordinary function, and are endowed with so little sensibility, that their existence is not known, in many instances, till upon dissection. Besides, in other cases, where disease is ascertained during life, we are not made acquainted with its full extent, and various complications, till we call in the aid of morbid anatomy. In

this way a world of pathological intelligence is opened to modern investigation. To suppose that all the evidence afforded by anatomical researches is merely posthumous—to fancy that pathological anatomy does not tend to discover the disease in any instance, but merely the “blight and blackening which it leaves behind,” would be, however, in glaring opposition to daily experience. On the contrary, there are many occasions where the information obtained by examining disorganized structure, and brought to bear upon new cases, is of such paramount importance during life that a colour is given to the expectations of those partial disciples of this school who have thought that morbid anatomy offered the only clue to the proper knowledge of disease, and that its assiduous study would speedily regenerate the whole system of medicine. For instance, in mechanical injuries—as fracture, or in obstructions—as hernia, the mischief is appreciated by the precise situation and form of disrapture or displacement. Here the cause of suffering is clear and definite, the field of investigation and experiment

comparatively limited and fixed. With due allowance, then, for differences of constitutional disturbance, the removal of disease, and the disappearance of anatomical lesion, proceed *pari passu*. While on the other hand, in incurable cases, the condition of the part after death bears the most satisfactory testimony to its impaired function and preternatural position. In some of the structural maladies of the eye, and in many of the accidental difficulties attendant upon gestation and delivery, the phenomena of disease are of the nature of demonstrable facts; and until attention be turned to the physical and mechanical character of these matters, all general considerations are of no avail. Again, in topical inflammations—in the maladies of definite regions and organs, as of the pelvic viscera, the circulating and respiratory apparatus, the cultivation of morbid anatomy, together with a careful linking together of physical signs and symptoms, has led to all our scientific knowledge; and we appeal to dissection for a sure corroboration of our clinical predictions. The investigation of the diseases of blood-vessels, which

has formed a distinguished part of this study, has been found to explain many obscure points of medical and surgical pathology. It has not escaped the notice of some critics, however, that those who have devoted their attention to the functions and disorders of these organs, have shewn a disposition to isolate them from the surrounding mass of disease in which they may be implicated, and to ascribe to them an independent agency in the generation of malady not warranted by our ordinary doctrines of the consentaneous action of vital tissues. The physiology and pathology of the brain and nerves have attracted the attention of the most gifted men of the day. While, however, their investigations have yielded an abundant harvest of intelligence of the most interesting and useful kind, it must be allowed that very opposite results have been obtained by their experiments and researches, and that much yet remains to be developed and ascertained.

But without bounding our notions by these more simple and intelligible positions of disease, we may at once broadly and frankly

allow, that in every case of malady, however fleeting and ephemeral, there is of necessity some preternatural state of organs or tissues ; that even what are called functional and symptomatic disorders, argue some modification of physical condition. When, however, we would endeavour to determine what this preternatural condition really is, and what are its causes, it must be obvious to any person of reflection that many circumstances must be considered which cannot be made clear by anatomical inspection. Some of the more palpable organic lesions may be detected by the knife ; but dissection must not be expected to discover the foundation of maladies characterized by totally different phenomena. How can anatomical researches acquaint us with the alterations in the fluids, the chemical reactions, the various electrical and galvanic operations, the relations, both physical and moral, with external agents, and the many familiar but evanescent changes which are called vital, and of which no physical test can take cognizance. These operations are continually going on, and they conspire to defeat

any attempt to measure all diseases by the application of one universal rule. Indeed, in those cases which are acknowledged to be the most favourable to an exact and accurate plan of analysis, there are frequently so many complications, and so many sources of fallacy, that we should be extremely [cautious in placing faith in any sweeping scheme which pretends to simplify all possible occurrences.

I am inclined, indeed, to go further, and to question whether this analytical method of investigation be in reality the true road to the due appreciation of many diseases. Analysis may be carried too far, at least for pathological uses. In systems of general anatomy, we see it trace all the tissues to one or two primary elements; so simple, that they cease to represent the modified structure of the organs which are variously constructed from these fundamental materials. Again, these same tissues, when examined chemically, yield merely gases in varying proportions; and pass from our view as the agents of vital functions. Their pro-

per organic character is destroyed, and in their new shape we cannot recognize them. So also there are results obtained by analysing very closely the anatomical mechanism of some diseases, which may be called scientific, but which have no similitude with the tumult and activity of living pathological phenomena.

On the contrary, many morbid conditions can be made intelligible only by viewing them as a *whole*—by enumerating all their elements—by associating their early history and progress—and by considering their many relations with extraneous and moral agents. In the large family of spasmodic, intermittent, and periodical complaints, there is frequently either no trace of organic mischief, or this is so much the same in all cases, however opposite, so subordinate to other considerations, and so unsatisfactory as an explanation of the peculiar and mutable character of the maladies during life, that we are naturally disposed to attend to more liberal and extended views of disease. In hypochondriasis, hysteria, and epilepsy,

the true condition cannot always be appreciated by a direct inspection of physical signs, without calling upon the testimony of the past and accumulating every concurrent circumstance. This is notoriously the case, too, with insanity, which, in many instances, cannot be seen, and measured, and defined, but yet can be practically judged of and appreciated. We can give no exact detail of its mechanism, but are not on that account less liable to feel and describe its nature and character.

Again, how important to the true discernment of delirium tremens and of puerperal mania is an acquaintance with predisposing and physiological causes ! How essential to diagnosis in gastrodynia, gout, neuralgia, is a departure from routine notions, and in distinguishing common from rheumatic and specific inflammations and malignant taints !

In many diseases of the skin, too, where so much is displayed to the view, it is impossible to decide what to think, or what to do, without careful research into their occult causes ; and yet the local obstruction

of this important and constantly active apparatus is as much an *organic lesion* as the affections of a mucous, or serous, or any other tissue.

There is another difficulty : a disease may be latent or imperfectly developed—and we must view it through the medium of its connexion with contemporaneous events. We occasionally find, too, that out of a succession of cases even (say of small-pox, or scarlatina), no one instance shall fairly combine all the characteristic ingredients which class under any established nosological definition. In every individual case some one element will be wanting, some anomaly in the accustomed manifestation of the disease will occur, or some complication with which we are not familiar. So that, in default of a due assemblage of symptoms, or when there are more present than we consider proper to the intrinsic disease, we have to recur to what we recollect of other better examples—to rectify perception by conception—to bear in mind an ideal model, which is not fully represented by any one actual case, but requires

selection and combination from others, before the proper association of signs and tokens be presented to the judgment.

I am at the same time aware that, in our art at least, this disposition to create a perfect whole out of a number of disjointed parts, and to give unity and coherence in theory to what is scattered and irregular in reality, has often led to the most arbitrary, artificial, and unsubstantial hypotheses—that is to say, where it has been in excess, and indulged without continual recurrence to fact and observation. And among other errors, it has engendered the fancy that there were separate principles or essences of disease! But I think we may set at rest this notion, and at the same time illustrate the proper mode of embodying the fleeting elements of some maladies, by referring to our opinions concerning sleep, puberty, old age, and other modes and modifications of the human system. We talk familiarly of sleep, of puberty, of old age, in a collective sense; we observe their symptoms, their progress, their termination, their whole character; we allow that they modify the en-

tire economy, physical and moral; but we never (except in poetry) suppose a distinct entity or essence of either. In the same way we speak of fever, of small-pox, of insanity, in the aggregate; but without considering them under the controul of an abstract power or independent principle, apart from general vitality.

Now this mode of reasoning *upon cumulative evidence*, which I have endeavoured to illustrate and ventured to inculcate, is directly the reverse of that called analysis. It may be truly designated synthesis—a placing together of parts.

There appears to be in the minds of some persons, a strange aversion to admit a due and sufficient variety in the primary causes and intrinsic characters of diseases. The advocates of the exclusive systems of irritation or congestion, of inflammation, or of organic lesion, are not satisfied with being partial to a favourite scheme, but they must be intolerant to all rival views; and, in twisting facts to illustrate their own plans—for all parties appeal to facts—we see them continually regard-

ing an isolated part of any composite morbid condition as if it were the whole, and installing a secondary and subordinate effect into the place of a cause. The attempts, however, to give one invariable explanation of the most complicated diseases, and to enlist the most opposite condition under one universal designation, are as absurd and as impracticable as would be a proposal to allow but one sense, or one passion !

In endeavouring to simplify our notions of the secret mechanism of some diseases, we lose sight of their broad and striking peculiarities. We get at the dry skeleton of pathology, without the clothing and life of clinical observation. It is no satisfactory explanation of the special differences among maladies, to learn that the nerves and blood-vessels are the universal agents in their production. What do propositions so naked, and abstract, and indiscriminating, amount to ? They may be true, but they are of no avail. They are not sufficiently descriptive and circumstantial to be interesting and useful. They are like the dates and names of

historical events, apart from the actions and characters of the personages. Even the terms sympathy, association of function and sensation, and other familiar abstractions, in reality explain nothing; being simply the enunciation of certain primitive facts, which are themselves to be accounted for. Inflammation, again, is a complex condition, brought about (or set up, as we say) by the simultaneous impulse of many controlling agents. In order to explain its modifications,—to understand why, in measles, it constantly prefers the Schneiderian membrane, and in scarlatina the pharynx; and is so variously directed and characterized in other diseases—we must admit the prior agency of special laws of the economy; and acknowledge inflammation to be, not a primary cause, but a morbid effect, generated by agents already in operation.

The practical views which we must take of diseases are various. We observe in cramp, and in urticaria, great pain and intolerable suffering suddenly coming on, and as suddenly subsiding. We have, on the other hand, scrofula and cancer, making of the whole of life

“ one long disease.” We see calculus arising from some peculiar vital constitution, becoming a chemical disorder of secretion, and ending in a mechanical obstruction to healthy function. In hydrophobia we have to observe the appalling effects of an insidious imperceptible agent; and in endemic fevers, of a diffused influence, or malaria: but this malaria, or this venom, be it remembered, has never yet been detected by the most subtle mechanical or chemical contrivance. It owes its inferred existence to pure reason, or induction. At other times, the palpable cause of mischief is found to be the presence of worms, of animalcules, of biliary or stercoraceous concretions.

Plague, scurvy, cachectic maladies, and broken-down constitutions, exhibit a derangement of many of the elements of our frame, so general that we can with difficulty fix upon any peculiar and exclusive feature; while in cataract it is merely the loss of one physical property (which is of no value but in the eye—which might never even be recognized out of the axis of vision) that destroys natural

function, and leads to great consequent inconvenience. In wounds and topical injuries, it would be glaringly absurd to seek for general predispositions and distant causes of suffering, when the mischief lies before us in a tangible shape. But surely it would be quite as wrong, in many cases of hereditary, malignant, and contagious disorders, to overlook peculiarity of temperament and specific poisons ; because the morbid lesions, which are locally developed in certain constitutional maladies, are but a small part of the whole diathesis. It not unfrequently happens, that a lurking contagion or hereditary taint, which is masked in one individual patient, or in one generation, may yet reappear in others, perfectly well-marked and developed ; and we must, in such cases, consider the morbid tendency, diffused universally over the economy, or pervading certain tissues, as well as the occasional and accidental phenomena, which give an outward and visible sign of its existence. Indeed, after having gained so much in surgical matters, by advancing from the partial

scrutiny of local diseases to the consideration of general physiological laws, and by mounting from effects to causes—it would be to surrender our advantage, were we, in medical researches, to retrograde and rivet our attention solely upon the traces and mechanism of disease ;—this would be to mistake morbid anatomy for the entire science of pathology.

We are thus driven to recognize several established differences in the nature of maladies, both with respect to their intrinsic causes, and to their aggregate character. It is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to determine with precision the proper number of classes to which all individual cases may be referred. This same difficulty exists in forming schemes of general anatomy, where writers have always disagreed as to the due number of elementary tissues : it has been found, in tracing the original varieties of the human race, and in referring particular tribes to their original source ; also in analyzing the primitive faculties of the mind—about which no two metaphysicians are

agreed ; indeed, in all branches of natural history, and throughout all science, whenever such an attempt is made, some points are universally recognized as clear and satisfactory, while there are others about which we hesitate and differ. We know that, in all vital phenomena, there is much more variation and complication than in purely physical occurrences ; but yet, though our notions of disease are indefinite, and the parallel between any two cases never rigid, yet we are justified in tracing analogies between them, and in separating them into groups, and looking out for their continual reappearance, as much as we are with regard to the approximations and contrasts of colours, tastes, and musical sounds. Therefore many of the imperfect nosological schemes which have been proposed, while they have excited derision, by classing together disorders totally opposite in their nature, have at the same time been well-founded in other respects. So that, while we fairly indulge our laughter at the incongruous portions, this very impression of their absurdity allows

an inference, indirect, but legitimate—that there is at bottom felt to exist a foundation for a true and natural arrangement, which, if developed with skill and judgment, would be readily understood and acknowledged. Indeed it is this natural foundation of constancy and renewal in the peculiarities of diseases, which enables us to recognize, as just and faithful representations, many of the faint outlines and the physiognomical sketches of maladies which our predecessors have drawn without much acquaintance with the scientific details of anatomy and physiology ; and these, like many of the maxims and proverbs of remote ages, being grounded on general and imperishable truths, will always retain their value ; while new illustrations, and more exquisite refinements, are continually adding to the primitive rules.

But any kind of testimony respecting the by-gone history of diseases, and shewing their identity or diversity at successive periods, is important ; for “ not to know (as a familiar quotation from Cicero says) what has been transacted in former times, is to

remain always a child." The information given by primitive writers, as to the appearance long ago of diseases familiar in our day, and as to the contradictory notions which have been entertained, at different epochs, concerning their nature and origin—as, for instance, about syphilis and small-pox; the accounts which we occasionally have of the varying type of epidemic maladies, of the spread of disorders considered endemic to new regions, and of the comparative fatality of plagues and pestilences in camps, gaols, hospitals, ships, and new colonies; the records of statistical medicine, which manifest the connexion between diseases and different localities, domestic habits, and political institutions;—all comprehensive reviews of this kind, tend to promote sound and just reasoning, and to keep within bounds all sanguine attempts to extend partial systems beyond their due limits; while, by accumulating facts and opinions, and by linking together individual and scattered occurrences, they enlarge and strengthen the basis upon which our practical conclusions

rest ; and give a stability to the whole fabric of pathology, which in its subdivisions cannot be obtained.

In this way medicine rises, from being a conjectural art, to rank on a level with the more determinate sciences ; the particulars being indefinite and varying, the general results regular and constant.

But however interesting the study of diseases might be, as a branch of natural history, and however necessary to the proper appreciation and discrimination of such preternatural conditions we might consider the cultivation of morbid anatomy ; yet this portion of our professional studies would never have attained to the rank which it holds in the estimation of the candid and enlightened, were it not for the intimate relation between pathology and therapeutics.

Enough has been said already of a disposition to continuance in pathological notions, notwithstanding occasional fluctuations in opinion, and partial improvements in research ; and I could quote very good authority to tell you that, in therapeutics,

there has been still greater constancy and adherence to ancient methods ; but, upon reflection, I am myself disposed to think differently. Nothing, indeed, could be made to appear more contradictory and inexplicable than an exposition of the countless multitude of remedies which have at different periods risen into esteem, become widely employed, and have then been forgotten ; but it would be a fruitless, and indeed melancholy task, to marshal in opposition the hosts of absurd theories and ignorant practices—to compare their rival uselessness, and determine their precedence in folly. It will better suit the purposes of this investigation to mark the constant parallel which has existed in the progressive development and improvement of systematic and practical medicine. Remedies have been for ages proposed for mere symptoms, without an attempt even to remove the intrinsic causes of disease ; and have been supposed to act with a peculiar and specific force upon morbid phenomena ; which scientific investigation has discovered to be mere ingredients in the sum of a com-

posite disorder;—and this short-sighted and superficial treatment has prevailed in internal as well as in external maladies. On the other hand, and contrasted with this fault, we find a corresponding rage for simplicity. There have been as many sweeping and uncompromising schemes in practice as in theory; and in the same way these are always fabricated by forgetting causes, confounding opposite conditions, and overlooking indications of cure held out to us in many characteristic ways.

But it is not as companions in error and humiliation alone that theory and experiment have been joined: the same light which has been shed upon anatomical physiological, and pathological researches, has reflected its influence upon therapeutics; and, in a great share of morbid conditions, the *methodus medendi* has been rendered more clear, and the cure more certain.

Within the department of the physician, the relation between the natural or modified functions of the various tissues and organs, and the curability of disease, has been suc-

cessfully investigated, and very generally acted upon. In surgery and midwifery, the connexion between scientific knowledge and remedial power has been still more direct and available. But from no part of our profession is the mortifying but just opprobrium removed—that, on too many occasions, our researches serve, indeed, to shew us the character and progress of malady, but do not, in an equal degree, disclose the means for its prevention and cure.

The continual reaction of experiment upon theory, and the intimate relation between pathology and therapeutics, being then recognized, and their co-operation both for good and evil illustrated, we can explain the influence of rational and enlightened medicine, founded upon anatomy and physiology, in hastening the downfall of many specifics, and in putting out of fashion many long-established remedial agents:

We know that one of the avowed objects of medical surgery is to diminish the number of operations, and to simplify cumbrous apparatus and complicated manipulations; and

there is no question that, throughout the healing art, the habit of tracing the natural history and tendency, and termination of diseases, goes to weaken our reliance upon numerous medicaments which have been in their day held in wondrous estimation. A trivial acquaintance even with morbid anatomy will induce us to relinquish, in certain cases of organic lesion, all expectation of restoring original structure. Habit and prejudice may, however, so long associate the administration of certain drugs, or the employment of certain instruments, with familiar diseases, that their disuse shall come to be regarded, by the ignorant and bigotted, as a surrender of power and a neglect of opportunity. But by those who are sufficiently used to weigh the force of physiological laws and pathological conditions, against the transient and trifling effort of superficial and misdirected plans of cure, it will not be allowed that any really useful agent, or any strictly necessary operation, was ever banished from the medical commonwealth. When our researches lead us to refer certain painful affections to the

trunks of nerves, or to their origin in the brain or spinal cord, we are not guilty of neglect in slighting many popular applications to their sentient extremities. If we treat with contempt a variety of cordials and nervous medicines (which both experience and science have proved to be inefficient), we are not thereby discountenancing any cure for organic obstructions to the circulating apparatus ; nor do we, in forgetting to employ various mucilages and gums (which could at best but coat the surface of the mucous membranes), abandon any effectual cure for tubercular phthisis.

Many of the erroneous notions which have prevailed, concerning the power of remedies and the necessity for operations have grown up from the popular custom of attaching importance to the drug or to the remedial agent, without regarding the variously combined circumstances which call for its employment ; and the same error has pervaded many fixed plans of diet. Every day, however, teaches us the folly of imputing a virtue to the means of cure independent of the inherent capacity of

the vital condition to turn it to account ; every day teaches us to expect nothing from the seed when the soil is not fitted to receive it. But here a reflection arises, as to the due extent of our allegiance to philosophical or scientific schemes of practice. Some doubt may be very justly entertained, even by those who are the most anxious to extend the dominion of reason and logical induction, whether the habit of adapting means to ends, and of calculating results from established analogies, may not beget a disposition to scruple the employment of what is useful, merely because its mode of operation is not clear, and to strain after an explanation on occasions, when it cannot, in the nature of things, be obtained, and we must be content simply to observe events ; whether we are not apt to forget that the immediate and specific action of all remedies upon our organs is a thing of fact, and not of reason and contrivance ?

Experimental medicine, the most ancient, and, all things considered, the most extensive division of our art, is the common ground where men of all opinions and all degrees of

acquirement must at times meet. And it is mortifying to one who has spent his life in scientific research, and grown old in the upright and rational use of professional experience, to be occasionally put on the same level with the youngest practitioner, and jostled indiscriminately by quacks. However, most things in this world have sprung, not from science, but necessity. If, indeed, one consider how few remedies, even the most familiar, act intelligibly and directly, and how many may be resolved into distant counter-irritants and fancied contra-stimulants, that they all transmit their power through a medium which is not the passive and faithful recipient of impressions, but is frequently active in defeating or modifying their influence,—if one scrutinize very closely the shifting and contradictory results of most experiments made upon vital organs, and be not content to receive as a satisfactory explanation what he frequently suspects to be merely a coincidence of unconnected facts, such a one will not wonder at the occasional disappointments to which the most experi-

enced are at times subjected, or at the disparity of benefit arising from the best-advised efforts.

Yet, with every allowance for the uncertainty in which remedial agency must ever be involved, and with every wish to encourage the extension of free and unshackled inquiry, we may with perfect fairness decide, that, even in those cases where the ultimate appeal is made to experiment, much may be done by scientific investigation and judicious preparation, towards narrowing the field of operation, and selecting a propitious moment for trial. Without alluding to the more established professional means of cure, this position could be exemplified by the production of innumerable examples, in which the rational employment of *specifics even* would be contrasted with their indiscriminate administration. But I will take as a mere illustration what we hear of the *ergot of rye*. If the reputation of this new therapeutic agent be well founded, and the testimony of many practical men in its favour be received, it would appear to be gifted with a peculiar,

unexplained, and *specific* power over the uterus, which renders it, without any insight at all into its *modus operandi*, of the highest utility in the hands of the skilful, under a certain combination of circumstances, and controlled by the presiding influence of prudence and integrity ; but when not used, but abused, by those who are unacquainted with physiological and pathological conditions, ignorant of anatomy, and untaught by clinical experience—who have neither the subdued and practical intelligence, nor the scrupulous fidelity of the true physician, is liable to become a pernicious and destructive instrument.

As to the popular reproaches which have been so frequently cast upon the more *orthodox* of our class, concerning jealousy of innovators, and unwillingness to adopt efficient remedies merely because they did not enjoy the sanction of authority, these are daily becoming more inapplicable. Indeed, the ready and universal promulgation of vaccination by the educated and enlightened, in opposition to the most inveterate prejudices

of the vulgar, would alone be sufficient to repel from our profession the charge of undue adherence to antiquated notions. Perhaps we may go further, and say, that in our day, the sin of bigotry and partiality lies really at the door of the empirical practitioners, who are commonly attached with blind and engrossing confidence to a single system or mode of cure, and prove on acquaintance to be, as it is called, “people of one idea,” which they are eternally pursuing, and investing with false and exaggerated airs of importance. How many quacks would go to the composition of an accomplished eclectic practitioner, I have never attempted to calculate. But it appears certain that we are less scrupulous about the source of knowledge or power, than about its practical value. Indeed, the liberality of the profession with regard to new remedies, very much approaches the easy carelessness of the polytheists of the Augustan age on the score of new religions. We have, like them, our old and tried modes—our household gods; but as these are not all-powerful, we are very

ready to enlist the divinities of all other countries into our calendar, and go where we may, to exchange our forms for others which may prove more efficacious. It is true that the miraculous pretensions of certain idols, which some enthusiasts have called upon us to worship, have at times been treated rather unceremoniously; this disrespect has, however, been excited not by their novelty, but by their impotence!

But after all is considered that reason can suggest, or that quackery dare risk in the way of relief to suffering, there remains a large portion of cases where we are equally deserted by theory, and compelled to relinquish experiment, which innumerable trials in analogous examples have proved to be of no avail; where neither science nor experience uphold us, and we drop into the Dead Sea of expectant medicine. This dull and sluggish element, which has engulfed so many sanguine schemes, is looked upon with a natural feeling of dislike by the ardent and enthusiastic; and yet, in too many instances, “to this conclusion we must come

at last.” However, I shall endeavour to shew that there are considerations which may reconcile us to the occasional submission of our aspiring endeavours unto the irresistible sway of natural laws; at any rate, I shall satisfy you that in making a necessary concession, it is more agreeable to be led by reason than driven by despair.

There is this great distinction to be made by those who practise faithfully, which, without being definite and exact, is sufficiently broad and intelligible to warrant us in paying it attention. In many cases of malady, the system may be regarded as the recipient of morbid impressions from some external agent, or is passive under the infliction of an injury which is accidental and extraneous; or, at any rate, the constitutional disturbance which may arise is rather a reaction or consequence of the original impulse; while in the generation of other diseases the intrinsic elements of the frame seem spontaneously active; these are set up and developed in a manner allied to the natural revolutions of the animal economy. The former class, or acci-

dental complaints, may be compared to the invasions of a state by a foreign foe, which are irregular and unexpected occurrences; while constitutional diseases are like civil tumults, depending upon latent causes, and proceeding as a necessary consequence of the growth and progress of a nation, and partaking of the popular condition and character. We know these last to be so entirely concomitant with the established functions and natural changes of the system, that they can only be understood by constant reference to primary physiological laws. We find a gradation from varieties of race and temperament, differences of constitution, diathesis, idiosyncrasy, habitual mode of life, and prevailing passion, or bent of mind, till there is but a step to actual disease. And then maladies are grouped according to different ages and functional periods, as the disorders of infancy and dentition, of childhood, puberty, of gestation, and the change of life in females, and, in both sexes, of old age; there are, in short, so many links between intrinsic or constitutional complaints, and the unavoidable

events of our physical and moral existence, that they can never be properly contemplated apart.

Now granting that much may be done by scientific measures, and even by empiricism, in accidental diseases and injuries, we must conclude that there are others where all abrupt interference with spontaneous natural processes is equally forbidden by reason and experience. But if there remain in the breast of any a feeling of dissatisfaction that on so many occasions we are compelled to caution and inactivity—that the character of philosophical medicine is so frequently negative, we may remind them that our profession is part of human nature, and must consequently ever partake intimately of its obscurity, uncertainty, and littleness. “It must be remembered,” says Dr. Johnson, “that life consists not of a series of illustrious actions or elegant enjoyments; the greater part of our time passes in compliance with necessities, in the performance of daily duties, in the removal of small inconveniences, in the procurement of petty pleasures; and we are well or ill at ease, as

the main stream of life glides on smoothly, or is ruffled by small obstacles and frequent interruptions." Reflecting on this, educated men of good sense and integrity will not lend themselves to the plans of extravagant pretention and ignorant meddling, by which quacks exist. Indeed we know, from what goes on in the world, that the only persons who engage to cure all diseases, are precisely those who know least about them. But while conscientious practitioners lay no claim to such unlawful and spurious titles to consideration, they have an ample inheritance of usefulness in the wide field of prophylactic, dietetic, and palliative medicine. In no way have we added more to our true power than by relinquishing violent and ill-advised practices, in favour of modes of cure "by the first intention," as it is called, and by the skilful management of general physical agents and moral influences which "do good by stealth." The information which is daily pouring in upon us, as to the secret but sure operation of climate, of habitual mode of life, of social and political circumstances, and of the change of these cir-

cumstances upon individuals and communities; the close alliance which is continually forming between our profession and the many sciences and useful arts which illustrate the nature of man, develop his faculties, improve his condition, or mitigate his sufferings;—all combine to gain for us sure and legitimate advantages, and to extend the beneficent influence of sober reason.

I have endeavoured, in this imperfect outline, to point out the existence in medicine of two great conflicting principles—one of analogy and constancy in aggregate events, and one of infinite variety and fluctuation in details; and to illustrate the necessity for those technical fictions by which they are reconciled. I have attempted to illustrate the analytical and the synthetical modes of appreciating disease, and have considered that general arrangements and descriptions forward us, while universal undiscriminating schemes carry us back to the original chaos; that the importance of morbid anatomy, as an auxiliary study, is too generally acknowledged to require argument; but that, while its cultivation, asso-

ciated with physiology and pathology, is obviously necessary to the elucidation of some diseases, it is, when proposed as a rigid test of others, not only insufficient in point of fact, but unphilosophical in its aim; because no localization can be attempted of those maladies which are diffused, and because no single method of investigation can embrace all the elements and relations of the more complex disorders.

I have concluded that our profession, moving forward with the general impulse of the age, shews a disposition to turn every science and every system to practical account, yet rebels against all attempts to enslave it to any one in particular; but that, having learnt caution from the past, it advances, by the aid of present intelligence, to unlimited discovery and improvement—*Nil actum reputans dum quid superesset agendum.*

AN APOLOGY FOR MEDICAL NOMENCLATURE.



IT is not unusual to hear professional men regretting that our popular nosological terms are indefinite and inexpressive, and do not accurately describe pathological conditions : it is, perhaps, not so common to reflect upon the reason of this—and therefore an attempt to elucidate the principle of the actual nomenclature of diseases may not be altogether unworthy of attention.

To all those who prefer rational and enlightened practice to empiricism, there is no division of medicine more satisfactory than the study and treatment of diseases of the

eye ; because here, more than elsewhere, the anatomical changes during life, the origin, progress, and results of morbid actions, are traced, and the various diseased conditions named, with some degree of precision. But even here, the causes and course of maladies being at times more obscure, the phraseology is then more loose ; and in other cases, even where we recognize the actual phenomena of disease, our view of it is swayed by considering its connexion with scrofula, syphilis, rheumatism, and other constitutional influences. In many parts of the body, again, although we do not enjoy the immediate sight of disease, yet, by various manipulations and researches, we can determine the existence of tubercles, indurations, strictures, tumors, fractures, &c. and give a name to each descriptive of its mechanical form or extent, its physical constitution, or the organ or tissue which is implicated in its formation. It will not be necessary to dwell upon the obvious advantages of knowing such definite and tangible morbid conditions as a cataract, an ossified valve, a contracted pelvis,

a luxated joint, or a strangulated intestine : of course our attention, both as judges of disease and as practitioners, is at once arrested by facts of such clearly intelligible existence, and of such momentous interest—we can understand them, and we can name them. But this precision does not extend to all the morbid changes to which the body is subject. It is not for me to conjecture whether we shall ever gain so accurate an acquaintance with physiology and pathology as to be able to assign to each disease its natural position and its appropriate name ; but it is very certain that, at present, we are far from being arrived at that desirable point ; for although, by means of pathological anatomy, animal chemistry, and the still more subtle analysis of philosophical investigation, scientific men are daily extending their conquests over the wilds of experience and conjecture, yet there is still an immense waste unsubdued ; or, to speak more plainly, there is still a large proportion of diseases which either occupy no cognizable anatomical position—as some nervous complaints—or which

leave no trace at all commensurate with their extent and importance—as tetanus and hydrophobia—or, which is still more common, go over so many parts, and occupy so much ground, that they cannot be said to belong properly and exclusively to any—as, for example, febrile and exanthematous complaints. All these, therefore, cannot be named with precision. The only resource is, to abide by the most prominent and enduring feature, and to adopt that term which from habit and association, has become identified with our general conception of the disease: and here we find the secret of the apparent absurdity of medical nomenclature. By a sort of tacit concurrence, practitioners and authors have used certain *proper names*, which are either quite fanciful and arbitrary, or drawn from the most intrinsic and characteristic conditions—as chorea, cancer, gonorrhœa, dyspnoea, dyspepsia, intermittent fever, delirium tremens—while they have, at the same time, disagreed about each other's explanation of the details of these very diseases: and for this reason, that the particulars are infinitely

varied, while (making due allowance for the fluctuation of circumstances, the introduction of some novel complaints, and the disappearance of others which are recorded) there has always been a good deal of constancy in the nature and progress, and duration of most maladies. Hippocrates could distinguish and appreciate the types and tendencies of diseases; indeed he is continually referred to by the most scientific men of the day, as a model of observant *tact* and foresight;—but wherever he has attempted to define anatomically, or physiologically, the worthy “father of physic” gets laughed at by his irreverent children. Since his day, systems have followed in unnumbered succession—one “strong man” defining and dogmatizing, until “another, stronger than he,” has come and disposessed him of his station. Nevertheless, all this while the great landmarks of pathology have been recognized. But let us see if the moderns would be quite agreed in any plan for a scientific and descriptive nosological scheme. Say that fever, for instance, is a very vague term, and should

be discarded—to whom shall we apply for a more accurate designation—to Clutterbuck, or Armstrong, or Broussais? Hypochondriasis is a lumbering inconvenient word, but yet we are obliged to use it; for although the morbid state which it implies is allowed to be merely a consequence of fifty different derangements of structure, or of function, yet it is necessarily conjoined with, and exclusively consequent upon, no one of them: and nearly the same may be said of some forms of dropsy. Again, rheumatism, though evident and familiar to every one, is a very difficult disease to fix down by an exact pathological definition. In exanthematous complaints, although there is morbid anatomy enough during their progress—as in erysipelas, variola, rubeola, scarlatina, &c.—yet there is frequently no trace left, and it would not be easy to determine at what precise period of their career such sweeping affections should receive their designation. With regard to syphilis, scrofula, and malignant diseases, many of the phenomena which attract the senses are merely conse-

quences of an accidental position in certain regions, and not tokens of any natural habitation in them: and then the forms are so infinitely varied, that no comprehensive name could be devised which would accurately describe all the possible physical conditions and anatomical postures of the complaint. There are some cases, indeed, where a name which connects a disease, however loosely, with a particular organ or region, is acknowledged to be improper—as, for instance, hysteria and hypochondriasis, which are inconvenient terms just so far as they have a partial signification, instead of conveying a general characteristic impression.

It is possible that the example of what are termed *phlogistic* complaints, (in which a comparatively simple and regular mode of action may be accidentally directed to any region of the body, and receive a descriptive title from its residence there,) may have led to the idea that a scientific nosological scheme could be arranged, which, founded upon pathological anatomy, should allot to each disease “a local habitation and a name.” But by the clinical

practitioner, the proposal to include, without discrimination, all the different types of fever—contagious disease, those produced by morbid poisons, hereditary complaints, spasmodic affections, skin diseases, scurvy and cachectic maladies, gout, diabetes—all under one arrangement, and to look upon them as different stages and varieties of the same essential mode of action, would justly be regarded as narrow-minded and mischievous.

Therefore, although we may all be inclined to quarrel with medical nomenclature *in detail*, and to suggest the explosion of some of its most palpable errors, we must, upon reflection, subscribe to the principle upon which all practical and practicable nosology is based—that is to say, the use of *proper names* for the characteristic forms of disease, instead of descriptive titles and scientific designations; which, however useful in matters which do not admit of doubt and change, and however much they may be desired in all cases, are to be admitted with the greatest caution in our profession, so long as the innovations of science are in progress.

At present it is clear that the currency which our popular names of diseases obtain, is purely conventional; they are mere rallying points for our general conception of the various types and kinds of malady; they have no intrinsic value, no pretension to exactness, and pledge to no theory; but, like the names London, Paris, Cromwell, Bonaparte, kindle at once familiar trains of thought, and that much better than any periphrasis, or exclusive definition, could possibly do.

For although it may, at first, appear a paradox that our general conceptions of disease should outlast the minute observation of the actual symptoms and phenomena, from which these very impressions result, yet such is really the case. We find men of experience disregarding accidental details, and bestowing their greatest attention upon the nature and history of diseases, and upon the diathesis and constitutions of their patients.

Indeed it is not more strange than what we see happen every day in the fine arts: a pupil in a gallery of pictures, at first, catches at the palpable peculiarities which com-

monly distinguish the different painters—the white horse of Wouvermans, the man fiddling upon a barrel of Teniers, the deep light and shade of Rembrandt—but the learned eye of the artist appreciates the whole stile, and manner, and feeling, of the various masters, even where these familiar tokens are not present.

FINIS.